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Stratford's Tomboy Cinderella

By HARVEY CHUSID

She loves fishing to the point of addiction and loathes thunderstorms to the point of blatant terror. She is a tomboy at heart, loses her mind over animals, lakes and trees cooking as much as eating, and would any day trade a banquet at the Waldorf for an outdoor barbecue.

She also sings — so well, in fact, that she is the leading mezzo-soprano with the Sadler's Wells Opera in London, and one of the brilliant coloratura mezzos of our time — Patricia Kern. On her first trip across the ocean, Miss Kern makes her North American debut tonight at the Stratford Festival, in the title role of Rossini's Cinderella (La Cenerentola), a role with which she has now become identified.

Coloratura mezzos are rarities; leading roles for coloratura mezzos are equally rare. The music is florid and extremely difficult. It entails singing several notes in tempo to every one syllable of the text, a skill which is acquired through technical training and intensive practice. "Practice," says Miss Kern, "is the key word. You can have a first class technique and still not be able to sing coloratura. There are not really many coloratura mezzo soprano parts because they were only written for specific people. We keep finding arias in museums which are no longer in the Rossini scores because he wrote them for people such as his wife, Isabella Colbran. And we can't find the people to sing them now. There is virtually no coloratura being written today. Contemporary music is what I call 'spikey', like Stravinsky."

Born in Wales, Miss Kern won an open scholarship to the Guildhall School of Music, where, after only one year of studies, she won all available awards for contralto. On leaving Guildhall, she was engaged for three years as principal mezzo-soprano with the Arts Council's "Opera for All" group. She was soon given roles with the Welsh National Opera Company and made her sadler's Wells debut in Russalka with Joan Hammond.

"Actually," says Miss Kern, "I was first brought in as a guest artist with the Sadler's Wells when the chorus was on strike and they had to do a potted version of Cosi fan tutte. The mezzo fell ill and they asked me to sing Dorabella."

The Sadler's Wells opera being a repertory company, Miss Kern has not been confined to Rossini, although her mastery of his exceedingly difficult music places her in solid demand for production of his works, which, during the past decade, have been subject to a new wave of popularity. "In a repertory company you have to be able to sing most things," she says. "You are not allowed to specialize. I might be singing Rossini this week and Strauss next week; I might even be singing them both the same week (though not if I can help it). The contrast is fantastic."

Pippi in The Thieving Magpie, Orlofsky in Die Fledermaus, Cherubino in The Marriage of Figaro, the Messenger in Orfeo, both title roles in Orpheus and Eurydice, Miss Kern has sung her full quota of male "drag" roles. "I enjoy a good romp around the stage," she says. She is still waiting for an opportunity to sing Octavian in Der Rosencavalier, and has outrightly refused, on more than one occasion, to sing Carmen.

"Carmens are born," she claims resolutely. "One must be an extra-extrovert, and it is a death-trap for a mezzo. I don't think I have either the right colour or texture for the role and there is a distinct barrier between my personality and Carmen's."

Miss Kern commands a range of just over two and a half octaves, enabling her to sing some roles normally composed for the soprano voice. Last season she made a triumphant debut in such a role with the Royal Opera Company at Covent Garden—Zerlina in Mozart's Don Giovanni. "I have not been able to sing with the Royal Opera before," she says, "because it is very difficult for me to get permission to leave Sadler's Wells for any length of time. Mezzos are very handy voice; they fit in well with the ensemble, with small parts. A lot of music is being written today for the ensemble, with important minor roles for the mezzo voice."

Afte one week in Canada, Miss Kern finds herself in very comfortable working conditions. "I am amazed here at the little hours that one works. At home we have sessions from 10.30 to 1.30, 2:30 to 5:30 and often 6:30 to 9:30. Canadian equity is much stricter than ours is in England."

With the Stratford Festival Opera Company she could not be more at ease. "One's surroundings make a vast difference in what comes out. If you are unhappy with the people with whom you work, there is not quite the sparkle. I is unnoticeable to anyone listening, but it is felt inside. If you are happy, your work is always that much brighter. I like to work hard, but I like a little relaxation and fun in between scenes and in rehearsal breaks. You get rid of a lot of tensions this way. It's marvellous; we're like a very happy family here."

Having sung Cinderella many times, both in England and Italian, the role for Miss Kern is still not exempt from change and discovery. "If you listen to yourself and criticize yourself quite truthfully," she says, "you always find something to improve. There is everlasting improving. When Rossini wrote these coloratura roles he included pauses in which singers can put their own cadenzas or their own florid bits, so long as they end on the note he wrote. You practically have a free hand if the cadenza is in his style and in the mood of the music which you are singing."

She has no doubts, however, that Stratford audiences will keep their eyes wide open. "Leslie Hurry's designs are fabulous," she says.

CINDERELLA: Mezzo soprano Patricia Kern from Britain makes her North American debut at Stratford tonight in Rossini's opera Cinderella (La Generentola).

CHARMER: Maria Lando, India's favorite Snake Charmer, will open at the Chez Paree on Monday for a limited engagement. Chez Paree, located at 1258 Stanley Street, has a continuous entertainment policy from 3.00 p.m. to 3.00 a.m. featuring 20 showgirls from all over the world along with two bands for your musical pleasure.

It's the shock value of rock music that counts to its indiscriminate fans

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ

Rock music is now the current rage. It pounds out its beat within the teenage subculture and in university classrooms. It is extolled by almost everyone. Recently a flood of articles in various publications have informed us that rock music is "where it's at, baby!" (And they hint "if you don't like it then you must be square, uninformed and unconscious".) Rock music's advance publicity is overpowering. We are told that the Jefferson Airplane "flies the runways of the mind and airways of the imagination" (Life, June 28), that the Doors' effect is "that of a mad organist tracing his fugue across an electric keyboard while . . . a crazy chemist concocts psychedelics out of the sonorities of a steel guitar" (New American Review No. 3), and that the Beatles' Sgt. Pepper album was "Britain's finest contribution to the arts in 1967" (Kenneth Tynan, London Observer). Among other things, rock music is described as eclectic, arty, soulful, relevant, mind-expanding, poetic — even musical. Obviously rock has come a long way from the heyday of Elvis Presley, Bill Haley and Fats Domino.

This plastic publicity and superflous hype does not really correspond with the music that is being produced.

Sure enough, there are groups and singers such as the Cream and the Rolling Stones who approach their music with unflagging wit, imatination and originality. The work of the majority of pop gods and psychedelic messiahs — such as the Jefferson Airplane, the Doors and Country Joe & the Fish — is disappointing. The gaudy pretentiousness of their music is dull and repetitive. Take the Doors, for instance. They are competant instrumentalists but are a long way from being musicians. The Doors' organist runs fancy patterns down his keyboard, yet they sound like, and have as much meaning as, the bleeps of a computor. Leader Jim Morrison's songs resemble rhymes sung in high school locker rooms; his philosophies on love, sex, women and wine are, at best, juvenile. The Doors have been praised for the theatrical way they perform, but their swaggering is merely flabby. There is no real sense of drama because the Doors are predictable.

This is the great trouble with today's electric troubadours: you know what they're going to say because they talk mainly about themselves. Their banal little lyrics are inflated self-glorifications. They contain little literary value, and even less spiritual worth. Who really cares about their numerous drug experiences? Who is concerned about how rotten their moms and dads were? The nilhilism of these groups does not result in a realistic appraisal of things as they are but in a fantasical daydream. Country Joe & the Fish race around the continent singing a song about Viet Nam, but what do they urge their followers to do about it? Drop out, turn on and "show your contempt by not voting." End result: a few egos have been satisfied and nothing is changed.

There is another disease that is devouring rock and that is over-instrumentation. Witness the widely ballyhooed arrival of Van Dyke Parks. Parks is a pleasant young man whose vocal song style is a cross between those of Julie Andrews and Rudy Vallee. In addition to warbling through his life story on his first album, Song Cycle, Parks also arranges and writes his own material. He is one of those multi-talents who simply must put his foot into everything. The only thing he does not do is play an instrument, so, as a result, Song Cycle is loaded with folk chorals, orchestras, combos, mandolins, cellos, the works. It is easily the most overproduced pop album ever produced. Song Cycle is a perfect example of the gutless intellectual pop schlock so evident today.

Yet the rock audience begs for more. The lack of discrimination that is a trademark of this "hip" pop audience is further exemplified by the generalized statement, made by more than one rock guru, "Rock is where music is today and all other types of music must measure up to rock". As it must always be, good music is what is to be striven for. Legions of spy-chedelic agents and con men designing the fanciest fold-out record covers and the most syrupy hype imaginable will never be able to replace the standards by which good music must be judged.

Treble and Bass Notes

By FRANCES GOLTMAN

UNLIMITED CONTRACT — NEW FOR CONDUCTORS? . . . Ever hear of a leader signing such an agreement? Orchestras seem desperate these days to hold on to their conductors when they really like them. William Steinberg, now 68 years old, was given this bargain with his permanent position, Music Director of the Pittsburgh Symphony (a post he has held since 1952) — he just sealed this with his signature — "AN UNLIMITED CONTRACT." A year from this fall, in 1969, Steinberg also assumes the post of Music Director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra where they have been having their troubles. Thus the Cologne-born Steinberg becomes the second conductor who has the honor to be Music Director of two major orchestras. Zubin Mehta was first with the Montreal Symphony Orchestra and The Los Angeles Symphony.

THREE B'S FOR MSO ON MONDAY. . . Bach-Beethoven-Brahms, the immortal trio will each be heard in one work this Monday in Salle Wilfrid Pelletier. Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 3, The Brahms' Violin Concerto in D major and Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Itzhak Perlman will be soloist in the concerto with Franz-Paul Decker leading the MSO in the third concert of the special Summer Festival Series.

ON DIFFERENT STEPS — RELIGIOUS, OPERATIC, MUSICAL. . . Remember that remarkable basso, Jerome Hines, who sang with the Metropolitan Opera at the Forum a few years ago? Hines is one of the few leading bass voices before the public. Jerome Hines, an extremely tall and imposing figure, a wonderful actor and good family man is also a composer whose religious opera has been performed. Imagine the surprise to read that from his religious and operatic planes (he is a leading singer at the Met for many years) that he has the lead role in a musical, "South Pacific." What a switch! Where? At Jones Beach Theatre for the complete summer. Opposite him will be — no, not an opera star, but a television singer, Kathleen Nolin. He has the port made famous by the late Ezio Pinza on Broadway when that celebrated singer left the Metropolitan.

FOR BAND MUSIC LOVERS . . . Every year I like to draw attention to the late Charles S. Campbell, K.C., whose name is synonymous with Band Music. The well-known man, a member of the legal profession, has perpetuated his name by leaving money to provide music for many who cannot afford tickets to indoor concerts and all those who love percussion and wind instruments. Tomorrow folks can hear The Black Watch (R.H.R.) of Canada in Lafontaine Park or the Canadian Grenadier Guards Band in Dominion Square. On Wednesday, July 10, two more, The Montreal Citadel of the S.A. in Dominion Square and Le Regiment de Maisonneuve in Molson Park. Thursday again in Dominion Square, the Royal Canadian Hussars. All these concerts start at 8.30 and let us hope for good weather.

IN ANTICIPATION — JUBILEE 200 . . . Here is some real news — already many events have been arranged for the 200th Anniversary of Beethoven's birth in Bonn. Although his date is December 16, the whole of 1970 will be devoted to Beethoven's legacies to the world. His immortal nine symphonies — opera, Fidelio — the 32 piano sonatas and five concerti — chamber music — the Missa Solemnis — quartets — songs — countless piano solos passed on from generation to generation. There has been a Beethoven Festival every two years in Bonn, the next would have been 1969 but it is postponed to have it happen in the Anniversary Year. Here are a few of the participants already known: Vienna, Berlin and Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestras, Claudio Arrau, Robert Casadesus, Wilhelm Kempff, Maureen Forrester, Gundula Janowitz, James King, Waldemar Kmentt, Christa Ludwig and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. What a year 1970 will be in the musical world!

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